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ABSTRACT

A model of effective college teaching is proposed, based on published research and informal interviews of reputed master teachers at schools in the Southeast and New England. Outstanding teaching was found to result primarily from a college teacher's skills at creating intellectual excitement and positive rapport in students. Skill at creating intellectual excitement has two components: the clarity of one's communications and their positive emotional impact on students. Instructors must focus attention on key assumptions and critical insights of a subject and not be distracted by qualifications that most concern them as scholars. Outstanding teaching is characterized by emotions associated with intellectual activity: the excitement of considering ideas, understanding abstract concepts and seeing their relevance to one's life, and participating in the process of discovery. The second dimension of outstanding teaching, interpersonal rapport, ensures that students learn maximally from the lecture or discussion and are not distracted by negative emotions. Teachers need to avoid generating excessive anxiety and anger toward the teacher and to promote positive feelings in students. Tables are presented to illustrate high, moderate, and low ranges of the two dimensions of outstanding teaching. (SW)

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Mastering College Teaching: Dramatic
and Interpersonal Skills

(Paper presented at the Sixth National
Institute on the Teaching of Psychology
to Undergraduates

Clearwater Beach, Florida, 1984)

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There are many ways to define effective college teaching. In the few minutes available today I would like to present a two-dimensional model that evolved during research I conducted for an instructional book for college teachers I recently completed called Mastering the Techniques of Teaching (Lowman, 1984). The model is based on published research and a series of 25 informal interviews of reputed "Master Teachers" at schools in the Southeast and New England that I conducted over the last two years. My objective was not to award citations for teaching excellence but to identify a sample of accomplished classroom instructors from whom to borrow techniques and assess attitudes. By studying these exemplars of our profession, I hoped to hold up a high model for all college teachers to pursue as well as providing some "tricks of the trade" and instruction in the specific skills needed to excel.

My research indicates that outstanding teaching results more than anything else from a college teacher's skill at creating intellectual excitement and positive rapport in students, the kinds of emotions and relationships that motivate them to do their best work. These two skills are relatively independent and excellence at either can ensure effective teaching with some

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students and in certain kinds of classes. A teacher who is accomplished at both is most likely to be outstanding for all students and in any setting.

Dimension 3: Intellectual Excitement. Skill at creating intellectual excitement has two components: the clarity of one's communications and their positive emotional impact on students. Clarity refers to what one presents and positive emotional impact results from how it is presented. Clarity can be no better than the accuracy of content and it is assumed that most instructors have mastered their content adequately. Knowing material well is quite different from being to present it clearly, however. Clarity is not sufficient to create intellectual excitement. Lucid, and well-organized lecture notes are unlikely to have their maximum effect on students or to create a genuine sense of excitement if they are delivered without enthusiasm or emphasis. Poor delivery does little to actively engage students' minds and stimulate their emotions.

Clarity does not necessitate simplicity. Knowledge is far more than the accumulation of isolated facts and figures. It also consists of a deeper understanding of facts, of being able to walk around them and see them from different angles. As Bloom argues in his classic taxonomy of educational goals (see Bloom, Madaus, and Hastings, 1981), knowledge includes the ability to analyze and integrate facts, to apply them to new situations, and to evaluate them critically within the broad context available to the educated person. For a teacher to do an excellent job, he or she must be

able to do far more than simply present the details of a subject--and students seem to know this. They like to receive an overall perspective and love to compare and contrast different concepts in addition to learning individual facts.

To be able to present material clearly, instructors must approach and organize a subject as if they too know little about it. To do this, college teachers' attention must be focused on the early observations, essential milestones, key assumptions, and critical insights of a subject and not be distracted by the qualifications and limitations which most concern them as scholars. Being able to do this comes from the ability to explain something complex simply.

Outstanding teachers share this facility for clear exposition. Ernest Rutherford, the turn-of-the-century British physicist, believed he had not completed a scientific discovery until he was able to translate it into readily understandable language (Hight, 1950). Similarly, the Greek and Hebrew teachers were masters of metaphor--of making complex points using a combination of simple language and concrete images. It is false snobbery to claim that one's knowledge is too grand to be understandable by a reasonably intelligent outsider. Outstanding college teachers are able to explain ideas and the connections between them in ways that make eminently good sense to the uninitiated.

Most students receiving consistently clear presentations will be able to correctly define, illustrate, and compare and contrast

concepts. What more could be desired from a teacher?

Understanding material does not mean students are intellectually excited: so highly engaged in a presentation as to be free from distracting thoughts and fantasies, to be surprised when a class period is over, or to feel compelled to talk about the class to one's classmates or others during the day. To have this kind of impact on students, an instructor must do far more than present material clearly. For maximum effectiveness on this first dimension, clarity is necessary but not sufficient. It must be accompanied by an equal virtuosity at speaking in front of groups. Why is this believed to be the case?

College classrooms are fundamentally dramatic arenas in which the teacher is as much the focal point as the actor or orator on the stage. The students are subject to the same influences and satisfactions--and susceptible to the same kinds of distractions--as any audience. As Epstein's (1981) portraits of outstanding twentieth-century teachers demonstrate, teaching is undeniably a performing art. Excellent teachers can use their voices, their gestures, and their movements before the class to elicit and maintain attention and to stimulate students' emotions. Like other performers, teachers must convey a strong sense of presence, of highly focused energy. Some teachers attain this by being overtly enthusiastic, dynamic, animated, or witty, while others accomplish the same effect with a quieter, more serious and intense style. The ability to stimulate strong, positive emotions

in students separates the competent from the outstanding college teacher.

Table 1 describes instructors at the high, middle, and lower ranges of this dimension of intellectual excitement as seen by an outside observer and as experienced by students. A teacher at the upper end of this dimension is an unusually skilled individual. To master college teaching to this degree, an instructor must be able to do more than prepare an accurate, well-organized synopsis of a content area. The teacher must also be able to organize and deliver it with all the skill of a seasoned speaker. Such teaching is not simply showmanship or gratuitous attention-getting, as assumed by disparagers who use "hamming it up," "showing off," or "faking it" when referring to this kind of teaching. As followup research on the famous Dr. Fox experiment has demonstrated, exciting teaching is not merely acting or entertaining (Kaplan, 1974; Meier and Feldhausen, 1979; Naftulin, Ware, and Donnelly, 1973; Perry, Abrami, and Leventhal, 1979; Williams and Ware, 1977). Entertainment involves the stimulation of emotions, the creation of pleasure, for its own sake. Outstanding teaching is characterized by emotions associated with intellectual activity: the excitement of considering ideas, understanding abstract concepts and seeing their relevance to one's life, and participating in the process of discovery.

To be sure, the success of a master teacher on Dimension I depends on acting skill. But it also depends on skill as

playwright, stage director, house manager, and ticket taker because of the requirements to plan and oversee other seemingly more trivial goings-on. The second dimension in this model of outstanding teaching ensures that students learn maximally from the lecture or discussion and are not distracted by negative emotions. It also ensures students will put forth their best effort to meet the challenges put before them.

Dimension II: Interpersonal Rapport. In theory, the college classroom is strictly an intellectual and rational arena. In reality, even for college-age youth, classrooms are highly emotional, interpersonal arenas in which a range of psychological phenomena can and will occur. For example, students' motivation to work will be reduced if they feel disliked by their instructor or controlled in heavy-handed or autocratic ways. All students are vulnerable to such disrupting emotions and some students are especially sensitive to them. Because of the professor's unavoidable role as evaluator, even students whose work is of superior quality will become angry if testing and grading practices seem unfair. Like others, students have a potential to react emotionally when they are being challenged and evaluated in group settings.

Instructors are not personally immune to what happens in the classroom either; many events can interfere with their enjoyment of teaching and lessen their motivation to teach well. Most professors have strong needs for achievement and like to be successful at everything they do. The common desire to be at

least average makes instructors' professional self-esteem vulnerable to their students' achievement and end-of-the-term ratings. This is especially true for those teaching for the first few times and for junior faculty facing tenure and promotion decisions. If students are not learning as much as expected, a college teacher is only human to feel threatened and be tempted to show anger by criticizing their efforts. Because they are human, instructors want to be liked and respected as individuals, and walking into a room of 50 to 100 strangers is guaranteed to raise interpersonal anxiety in anyone.

Psychologically, classrooms of students behave like other groups. The study of group phenomena has convincingly demonstrated that people interacting in almost any kind of group situation, from digging a ditch to designing a research program, will show predictable emotional reactions to their interactions with one another (Cartwright and Zander, 1953; Shaffer and Galinsky, 1974). Issues of leadership (or control) and affection (or how much individuals feel respected and liked by others) can always be counted on to be present. It is a consensus among researchers of group phenomena that groups are very much more than the sum of their individuals and that regardless of the group's purpose or the nature of the work, an undercurrent of common emotional concerns is everpresent.

College classrooms are no different. They are complex and emotional interpersonal arenas where a variety of emotional reactions can influence how much gets learned and how the

participants feel about it. Richard Mann and his colleagues at the University of Michigan convincingly illustrated these common college classroom phenomena by coding and analyzing individual comments of students and teachers in four introductory psychology classes (Mann and others, 1970). Theirs' is a rich and insightful portrayal of this emotional substratum of college classrooms detailing teacher roles, students types, and predictable changes over a semester.

Dimension II deals with an instructor's awareness of these interpersonal phenomena and with his or her skill at communicating with students in a way which increases motivation, enjoyment, and independent learning. This is done in essentially two ways. The first is to avoid stimulating a number of interfering emotions, notably excessive anxiety and anger toward the teacher. The second is to promote positive emotions in students, such as the feeling the instructor respects them as individuals and sees them as capable of performing well. These sets of emotions strongly affect students' motivation to complete their assignments and learn material, whether their motivation is more for approval from the teacher or for the satisfaction of meeting their personal standards.

Table 2 contains descriptions of teaching at three points along this second dimension of teaching effectiveness. The first dimension refers almost totally to what an instructor does in the classroom while the second dimension is significantly influenced

by teacher-student interactions outside as well as inside class. Dimension II is especially critical to success in one-on-one teaching situations. For most settings, Dimension II is not as critical to outstanding teaching as Dimension I, although it does contribute significantly to class atmosphere and the conditions under which students are motivated to learn.

Dimension II is admittedly more controversial than Dimension I. No one is likely to advocate that teachers be vague and dull, though some professors are likely to believe clarity is all that is required, seeing attempts to be exciting or inspiring as demeaning. And yet, less consensus would be found among college faculties about where on Dimension II an outstanding instructor should fall--whether he or she should be autocratic and aloof or more democratic and approachable. Some professors sincerely believe that recognizing students' personal emotional reactions is not only irrelevant to learning content, but that it also impedes their growth into mature and responsible adult learners because it indulges or coddles them. Other instructors are just as certain that a distant, autocratic style of teaching is a cruel vestige of the past that does not promote independent learning of the kind likely to continue when the class is over. Faculty holding this more humanistic position emphasize two-way interaction between teachers and students and believe this approach superior at encouraging independent learning. Socrates is the more ideal teacher in their eyes than some irascible "Herr Professor" of the nineteenth-century German lecture hall.

In contrast to faculty disagreement about Dimension II, the summary of research on student ratings shows there is little question which end of this continuum most students prefer. They prefer more democratic and approachable teachers (Uranowitz and Doyle, 1978)--if the teachers are first clear and interesting. Research indicates students give relatively more weight to Dimension I than to Dimension II (Keaveny and McGann, 1978; Marques, Lane, and Dorfman, 1979).

Combining Dimensions I and II. Table 3 presents the full model in which Dimensions I and II are combined to form nine combinations, each representing a unique style of instruction associated with different probabilities that students will learn to their fullest potential from them. Because Dimension I is the more important, they are numbered from 1 to 9 in ascending order of overall effectiveness.

Keep in mind that the nine styles of teaching are generalizations and will not describe every college teacher exactly and individual instructors may share elements of more than one type. Instructors in novanta 1, 2, and 3 are less than fully competent. The "Adequates" will be minimally successful in lecture classes and with relatively compliant students but need increased interpersonal skill to expand the types of students and situations in which they will be effective. Similarly, the "Marginals" need to improve their ability to present material. College teachers in cells 4 and 6 represent the most unusual combinations of skills. The "Socratics" excell at promoting

independent work and will be ideal for students and subjects well-suited to seminars. Their approach will be inadequate in larger classes requiring lecturing. Conversely, the "Intellectual Authorities" will be able to create intellectual excitement and promote achievement in many students, notably those confident in their own abilities and comfortable with the instructor's distant manner. Younger or less able students are likely to experience such instruction as unduly anxiety arousing, however. For all students, the "Intellectual Authority" is more likely to be respected than loved.

All instructors in novants 7, 8, and 9 are outstanding, individuals who have without question attained excellence at college teaching. Students are likely to describe "Masterful Lecturers" as those who captivate them by sheer intellectual force and motivate them to learn material because it seems a terribly important and exciting thing to do. Students might also describe these cell-8 instructors as a bit mysterious--persons they would like to know better. Many students do their best work under such a college teacher. Yet, younger students or those with limited academic skills and confidence are less likely to benefit maximally from what the instructor has to offer. In contrast, students with "Masterful Facilitators" feel close to their instructor. Instructors here are likely to be described in warm and enthusiastic terms by students who like to work independently and to be able to stimulate independent work of high quality. Such college teachers are sought after by students after class and

are particularly effective in smaller, more advanced classes characterized by considerable discussion. "Masterful Facilitators" are also likely to become important in their students' personal lives as students come to them for advice or attempt to model their lives or careers after them. Masterful lecturers and facilitators have their forte, but each is capable of providing competent instruction in all situations. The rare "Complete Masters" of cell 9 are able to perform superbly in lecture hall or seminar room and to modify their approach so as to motivate all students--from the brilliant to the mediocre. Few if any of Epstein's portraits reach this degree of flexibility and I can classify in this cell only one or two of those I interviewed.

Most students will do well under any cell 7, 8, or 9 instructor, but may still prefer one type or the other. Some will be more comfortable with the impersonality of "Masterful Lecturers" or prefer learning someone else's view of the content. Students desiring to express their creativity, to tackle learning more independently, or to have more personal relationships and individualized instruction will prefer "Masterful Facilitators." Any student is likely to rate these masterful types highly.

Outstanding instructors, then, are those who excel at these two dimensions of teaching effectiveness. Every competent teacher must have at least moderate skill at each but there is considerable room for variation. This model assumes that some students will learn more under one style of instruction than another but that all students will learn more and prefer college

teachers in the masterful novanta. It also assumes that instructor skill on Dimensions I and II is distributed normally. Most are competent, falling at the mid-range of each dimension and relatively few are above or below the norm. The lessons in my book (Lowman, 1984) are designed to help those with less-than-competent skills to improve and those already in the mid-range to attain excellence.

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Table 1

Dimension I: Intellectual Excitement

	<u>Observer's Description of Teaching</u>	<u>Its Impact on Students</u>
<u>High: Extremely Clear and Exciting</u>	—All content is extremely well organized and presented in crystal-clear language —Relationships among specific concepts and applications to new situations are stressed —Content is presented in an engaging way with high energy and strong sense of dramatic tension —Teacher appears to love presenting material	—Students know where the teacher is going and can distinguish important from unimportant material —Students see connections among concepts and can apply them to new situations —Students have little confusion about material, but especially about what the teacher has said —Students have a good sense of why concepts are defined as they are —Ideas seem simple and reasonable, almost obvious and easily remembered after teacher has explained them —It is very easy to pay attention to teacher (almost impossible to day dream) —Class time seems to pass very quickly and students may get so caught up in the ideas they forget to take notes —A sense of excitement about the ideas under study is experienced frequently and most students hate to miss class —Course and teacher are likely to be described as "great" or "fantastic"
<u>Moderate: Reasonably Clear and Interesting</u>	—Facts and theories presented clearly within an organized framework —Material presented in an interesting manner with a moderate level of energy —Teacher seems moderately enthusiastic and involved in teaching the class	—Students' understanding of most concepts is accurate and complete; they find it easy to take good notes in such a class —Students can see connections between most concepts and understand examples offered in class or the text —Class is moderately interesting and enjoyable for most students —Course and teacher likely to be described as "good" or "solid"
<u>Low: Typically Vague and Dull</u>	—Some material is organized well and presented clearly, but much is vague and confusing —Most material is presented with little energy or enthusiasm —Teacher may seem to hate teaching the class and to be as bored with it as the students	—Students have little idea of where the teacher is going or why material is presented as it is or even at all —Students experience confusion or uncertainty frequently —Most students find this a difficult class in which to take notes —Students see few relationships among concepts and little relevancy between content and their own experience —Students find this a very difficult class to pay attention to and time may seem to pass very slowly —Students frequently experience a sense of frustration or anger and may dread coming to class, welcoming excuses not to go —Most students are likely to describe the class and teacher as "boring" or "awful"

Table 2

Dimension II: Interpersonal Rapport

	Observer's Description of Teaching	Its Impact on Students
<u>High:</u> Extremely Warm and Open; Highly Student-Centered; Predictable	- Teacher appears to have strong interest in the students as individuals and high sensitivity to subtle messages from them about how they are feeling about the material or the presentation - Teacher acknowledges students' feelings about matters of class assignments or policy and encourages them to express them; may poll their preferences on some matters - Teacher encourages students to ask questions and seems eager for them to express personal viewpoints - Teacher communicates openly and subtly that each student's understanding of the material is important to him or her - Teacher encourages students to be creative and independent with the material, to formulate their own views	- Students feel that the teacher knows who they are and cares about them and their learning a great deal - Students have positive and, for some, affectionate, thoughts about the teacher; some may identify with him or her strongly - Students believe teacher has confidence they can learn and think independently about the subject - Students are highly motivated to do their best, in part so as not to disappoint the teacher's high expectation of them - Students are likely to describe teacher as a "fantastic person"
<u>Moderate:</u> Relatively warm, approachable, and democratic; predictable	- Teacher is friendly and personable to students but makes no great effort to get to know most of them - Teacher announces policies and discusses student reactions to them if the students complain - Teacher responds to student questions and personal comments politely and without apparent irritation - Teacher is relatively consistent and predictable in behavior toward students; gives ample notice before announcing requirements or changes in schedule	- Students have little fear or anxiety about the teacher or their ability to perform successfully in the class - Students know what the teacher expects of them but feel little responsibility to go beyond that level of performance - Students are reasonably well motivated to complete assigned work and to perform well - Students are likely to describe teacher as a "nice person" or a "good guy" or "nice lady"
<u>Low:</u> Cold, distant, highly controlling; may also be un- predictable	- Teacher shows little interest in students as persons; knows few of their names and may fail to recognize many of them out of class - Teacher is occasionally sarcastic or openly disdainful about students, their level of performance in the course, or their non-academic interests (e.g., athletics, popular music) - Teacher seems irritated or rushed when students ask questions or drop by, sometimes even during office hours - Teacher simply announces requirements and policies and seems defensive or angry if they are questioned - Teacher may be inconsistent and unpredictable, e.g., by smiling when saying insulting things about students, by giving backhanded compliments, or by announcing assignments or requirements at the last minute	- Students feel teacher has no personal interest in them or their learning; some students may believe teacher actively dislikes them or is "out to get them" - Students believe teacher has a low opinion of their ability or motivation to learn course content - Students generally are afraid to ask questions and only the boldest will voice a personal opinion - Students are motivated to work from primarily a fear of failure or ridicule from the teacher and see assignments as something the teacher imposes on them - Even if they are interested in the content, students may dread studying it or may rethink their previous desire to major in the subject - Students always feel uneasy in these classes or around the teacher and may, at times, experience significant anxiety or anger - Students are likely to describe the teacher as a "bitch" or "bastard"

Table 3

Two-Dimensional Model of Teaching EffectivenessDimension I:
Intellectual
Excitement

<u>High:</u> Extremely clear and exciting	<u>Cell-6: "Intellectual Authorities"</u> Outstanding for many students and classes but not for others	<u>Cell-8: "Masterful Lecturers"</u> Especially skilled at large and introductory classes	<u>Cell-9: "Compleat Masters"</u> Excellent for any student and situation
<u>Moderate:</u> Reasonably clear and interesting	<u>Cell-3: "Adequates"</u> Minimally adequate for many students in lecture classes	<u>Cell-5: "Competents"</u> Effective for most students and classes	<u>Cell-7: "Masterful Facilitators"</u> Especially skilled at smaller, more advanced classes
<u>Low:</u> Typically vague and dull	<u>Cell-1: "Inadequates"</u> Unable to present material or motivate students well	<u>Cell-2: "Marginals"</u> Unable to present material well but will be liked by some students	<u>Cell-4: "Socratics"</u> Outstanding for some students and situations but not for most
	<u>Low:</u> Cold, distant, highly controlling, and unpredictable	<u>Moderate:</u> Relatively warm, approachable, and democratic; predictable	<u>High:</u> Warm, open, predictable, and highly student-centered;

Dimension II: Interpersonal Rapport

Note: Cell numbers assigned based on rank in overall effectiveness.